



Communicating and Interacting with People with Disabilities

Please use this guide as a reference toward making Poetry Out Loud more accessible and inclusive. If you would like to request an accommodation, please contact your POL coordinator.

Try using...	Instead of...
Person with a disability ¹	The handicapped, the disabled, special needs
Person without a disability	Normal person, able-bodied
Person has [disability]...	Suffers from, victim of, afflicted with a condition
Wheelchair user, Person who uses a wheelchair, mobility device, etc.	Wheelchair-bound, -stricken, -confined
Person with a physical disability or limited mobility	Crippled, lame
Deaf person ²	The deaf, the hearing impaired, deaf-mute
Person who is hard of hearing	Hearing impaired
Person who is blind or has low vision	The blind, visually impaired ³
Person with a speech disability	Speech impediment
Person of short stature, little person, dwarf	Midget
Person with an intellectual disability	Retard, slow special needs, Downs
Person with a psychiatric disability or mental illness	Crazy, emotionally disturbed
Person with limb loss or limb difference; congenital disability	Deformed, defective
Non-verbal, unable to speak	Mute, dumb
Older adult, elder	The elderly, old people, senile
Service animal	Seeing-eye dog
Companion, personal assistant	Caregiver, caretaker
Accessible seating, restrooms, parking	Handicapped seating, restrooms, parking

¹ Please note that within the disability community, some people prefer person-first language (“person with a disability”), while others prefer identity-first language (“disabled person”). People with disabilities can choose how they self-identify. Please do not correct people with disabilities on how they choose to refer to themselves, even if their choices vary with the content of this guide.

² The Deaf community has a strong sense of identity and culture and often uses a capital “D” when referring to Deaf culture.

³ Words that imply lesser or different, such as “challenged,” “impaired,” and “special,” are often discouraged by the disability community.